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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002927

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: NEW THAI CABINET RECEIVES ROYAL ENDORSEMENT

REF: A. BANGKOK 2899 (NEW APPOINTMENTS)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2357 (RESHUFFLED CABINET)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 409 (NEW CABINET)
[1](#)D. 07 BANGKOK 55 (REACTION TO BOMBS)

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Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle, reason: 1.4 (b, d)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) Prime Minister-elect Somchai Wongsawat's cabinet lineup -- scheduled to be sworn in late in the day on September 25 by King Bhumibol -- consists primarily of partisan political figures associated with the administration of Samak Sundaravej. Following Samak's example, Somchai will concurrently hold the position of Defense Minister. Former Police Chief Kowit Watana remains Interior Minister; a water engineer who served under Samak as Minister of Culture has been made Justice Minister. As reported in ref A, former Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh received a Deputy Prime Minister position, and veteran politician Sompong Amornwiwat became Foreign Minister. Septel will report on the economic team.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Somchai appears to be reshuffling Samak's cabinet rather than building a team likely to chart a new course. There is a widespread expectation that Somchai's administration will be preoccupied with legal proceedings that threaten the continued existence of Somchai's People's Power Party (PPP) and two of its partners, as well as with ongoing protests and preparation for a possible early election in the not-too-distant future. These issues, combined with the continuity in cabinet personnel, make it unlikely that this administration will suggest new policy initiatives beyond what is necessary to improve the odds of its own survival or reelection. End Summary and Comment.

MAINTAINING A BALANCE

[1](#)3. (C) King Bhumibol endorsed Somchai's cabinet list on September 24. A solid majority of the members of Somchai's cabinet are holdovers or returnees from his predecessor's. Of the 36 members serving under Somchai, only 12 did not hold positions under PM Samak. Somchai's cabinet also maintains

essentially the same balance among the People's Power Party (PPP) coalition partners. Chart Thai, the third largest party in the House, holds five cabinet seats; Somchai's ties to Chart Thai Party Leader Banharn Silapa-Archa may be strengthened by the entry into the cabinet of Banharn's son, Varawut, who was appointed Deputy Transportation Minister. The Motherland Party holds four seats; Motherland Party Leader Suwit Khunkitti, who resigned angrily from the Samak cabinet when it became clear he would lose out in a cabinet reshuffle, was not brought back into the fold. Smaller partners Ruam Chai Thai Chart Pattana and Matchima Thippathai hold two seats each. Uraivan Thienthong, wife of veteran politician Sanoh Thienthong, remains in her position as Labor Minister, and is the sole cabinet member from the Pracharaj Party.

PUBLIC REACTION

14. (C) Predictably, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) publicly criticized the cabinet as a creation of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and offered no indication that the PAD would end its protests in the near term. Abhisit Vejjajiva, the leader of the opposition Democrat Party, criticized the cabinet lineup, saying it did not represent an improvement on Samak's administration. Journalists and pundits have predicted that Somchai's administration will not last until the year's end.

15. (C) On September 24, we asked incoming Deputy Transportation Minister Varawut Silapa-Archa whether the current environment appeared conducive to military intervention (and, specifically, to a coup). Varawut, who

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has often been candid with us in the past, said former PM Samak had proven very generous and deferential to the military; Varawut believed the military was not inclined to rebel against the PPP leadership. Varawut suggested that Somchai would refrain from dissolving the House of Representatives unless absolutely necessary, and that the longevity of the cabinet depended primarily on the dissolution cases proceeding against PPP, Chart Thai, and Matchima Thippathai.

COMPLETE LINE-UP

16. (U) The complete line-up of the Somchai Wongsawat cabinet is as follows:

Prime Minister:

- Somchai Wongsawat (concurrently Defense Minister)

Deputy Prime Ministers:

- Chavalit Yongchaiyudh
- Olarn Chaipravat
- Sanan Kachornprasart
- Sompong Amornwiwat (concurrently Foreign Minister)
- Chavarat Chanveerakul

Others:

- Interior Minister Kowit Watana
- Deputy Interior Minister Prasong Kositanon
- Deputy Interior Minister Preecha Rengsomboonsuk
- Finance Minister Suchart Thadathamrongvech
- Deputy Finance Minister Pradit Partaraprasit
- Deputy Finance Minister Ranongrak Suwanchawee
- Commerce Minister Chaiya Sasomsap
- Deputy Commerce Minister Banyin Tangpakorn
- Deputy Commerce Minister Songkram Kijlertpairote
- Justice Minister Somsak Kiartsuranont
- Industry Minister Pracha Promnok
- Transportation Minister Santi Prompat
- Deputy Transportation Minister Varawut Silapa-archa
- Deputy Transportation Minister Sophon Saram

- Agriculture Minister Somsak Prissanananthakul
- Deputy Agriculture Minister Sompat Kaewpijit
- Deputy Agriculture Minister Theerachai Saenkaew
- Public Health Minister Chalerm Yoobamrung
- Deputy Public Health Minister Wicharn Minchaiyanant
- Labor Minister Uraiwan Thienthong
- Energy Minister Wannarat Charnnukul
- Education Minister Srimuang Charoensiri
- Natural Resources and Environment Minister Anongwan Thepsuthin
- Social Development and Human Security Minister Udomdet Rattanasathien
- Information and Communications Technology Minister Mun Patanotai
- Science and Technology Minister Wutthipong Chaiseng
- Culture Minister Worawat Ua-apinyakul
- Tourism and Sports Minister Weerasak Kowsurat
- Minister Attached to the Prime Minister's Office Sukhumpong Ngonkham
- Minister Attached to the Prime Minister's Office Supol Fong-ngarm

(Note: Deputy PM portfolios are typically defined after the cabinet begins work, though Chavalit has said he will work on "security" issues, and Olarn, the former Chair of Siam Commercial Bank and not a member of a party, is expected to coordinate economic policy. The portfolios of the Ministers Attached to the Prime Minister's Office also currently remain undefined. End Note.)

BIOS

17. (C) Biographic sketches of selected members of Somchai's cabinet follow; refs B and C provided further biographic information on selected members of Samak's cabinets, some of whom have been reappointed by Somchai. Biographic sketches

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of members of the economic team will be reported separately.

- Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh: Chavalit entered politics after retiring in 1990 from a military career capped by his service as Army Commander, the most powerful uniformed position in the country. As a civilian, Chavalit held numerous high-level cabinet positions and founded the New Aspiration Party (NAP). The NAP won a plurality in 1996 elections, allowing Chavalit to become Prime Minister from November 1996 until November 1997, when he resigned after the Asian Financial Crisis started in Thailand. After Thaksin Shinawatra became Prime Minister in 2001, the NAP joined Thaksin's coalition before agreeing to merge with Thai Rak Thai; Chavalit served as Deputy PM and then as Defense Minister. Chavalit was born on May 15, 1932. Contemporary political cartoons typically portray him as incoherent and senile. He is also perceived as a practitioner of the worst sorts of political machinations; after December 31, 2006 bombings in Bangkok, Chavalit had to defend himself publicly against insinuations he might have orchestrated the bombings for political purposes (ref D). Ref A provides further background on Chavalit and discusses some implications of his joining the cabinet.

- Deputy Transportation Minister Varawut Silapa-Archa: Varawut is the only son and political heir-apparent of Chart Thai Party Leader Banharn Silapa-Archa. He first ran for parliament in 2001, as a candidate from Chart Thai's stronghold of Suphanburi province, and after election he became Secretary of the Science Minister and then Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Sports. After his reelection in 2005, he became a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Born on July 11, 1973, he left home at the age of 12 to attend a boarding school in England. He then graduated from London University with a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering. He then received a Master's Degree in Finance from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Varawut frequently

serves as interpreter for his father's meetings with foreign dignitaries.

- Deputy Interior Minister Preecha Rengsombooksuk: Preecha, from the province of Loei in northeastern Thailand, has been active in politics since 1986, when he was elected to the House of Representatives. He moved from party to party, as is common in Thailand. He was elected as a Thai Rak Thai MP in 2005 and subsequently moved to the PPP after TRT's dissolution in 2007. He has served as Secretary to high-ranking officials in the Ministries of Interior, Agriculture, Public Health, and Science. Prior to joining Somchai's cabinet, he was Vice Chairman of the House Committee on Industry. Preecha was born on November 2, 1957; he received a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering from a university in the Philippines.

- Minister Attached to the Prime Minister's Office Sukhumpong Ngonkham: Sukhumpong entered politics in 2001, when he was elected as a Thai Rak Thai MP from Kalasin province, in northeastern Thailand. In 2005, he was reelected as a TRT party list candidate. He served in Thaksin's administration as Deputy Secretary General to the Prime Minister, and then, in 2006, became a legal advisor to the Prime Minister. After TRT's dissolution, Sukhumpong moved to the People's Power Party and became PPP Deputy Secretary-General. Sukhumpong was born on January 30, 1953. He received a Bachelor's degree in law from Thammasat University. Prior to entering politics, he worked first as a bank manager and later ran a law firm in Kalasin province.

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